

Statement of Rep. Eliot L. Engel

Regarding Elections in Albania

H. Con. Res. 155

I would like to thank the Chairman and the Ranking Member for expediting consideration of H.Con.Res. 155, urging Albania to hold its July 3 parliamentary elections in accordance with international standards. I would also like to thank the lead sponsor, Chris Smith, for his work on this legislation. These elections are not only important as Albania works to develop its democratic system, but they will set the tone for the Balkan nation in the months and years ahead.

The United States and Albania have strong ties that go well beyond government relations. For that reason, we believe it important to support the people of Albania and their right to choose their elected representatives freely and fairly.

In the 15 years since Albania's brutal communist dictatorship came to an end, the country has struggled in its transition. While some elections have been problematic, there have been improvements over time, and now the country has a real chance to achieve the same international election standards that the United States, Canada and all of Europe adopted in 1990. Between now and election day, the real issue is whether the authorities, political parties and other stakeholders have the will to abide by the laws, regulations and a code of conduct. The active U.S. congressional interest expressed in this resolution can encourage all involved to do the right thing.

A good election process will have enormous benefits for Albania. Domestically, it will enable the next government to take stronger measures to address the official corruption and combat the organized crime which together thwart stronger economic recovery. Internationally, it will enable Albania to take the next steps to joining NATO and the European Union. Supporting Albanian elections today will only strengthen our relations in the future.

I will be in Albania for the July 3rd elections and will lead a delegation of Albanian Americans monitoring that the polling and counting will be done in accordance with international standards. This resolution will help make the case for a good election.

As the lead Democratic sponsor of this resolution, I urge the Subcommittee to favorably report H.Con.Res. 155 to the full Committee.